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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002596

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: FORMER PRESIDENT DEMIREL TELLS AMBASSADOR
TURKEY MUST MEND FENCES WITH U.S.

REF: ANKARA 2521

(U) Classified by Ambassador W. R. Pearson. Reason:1.5(b)(d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In an April 21 meeting with Ambassador, former President Suleyman Demirel offered his thinking on the way ahead in U.S.-Turkey relations. Demirel volunteered that there is a debate in Ankara power centers about Turkey's strategic orientation; but that in his view, "the Turkish Army cannot make war on the Kurds or the people of northern Iraq." Turkey, he stated, has no alternative but to repair ties to the U.S. End summary.

¶12. (C) Demirel observed that Turkey would have been better served had the GOT been up front with the United States from the beginning on Iraq: "90% of the public was against the war. They (GOT) should have told you that they simply could not open a northern front, but would support you in other ways. Then they wouldn't have had to push the (failed) March 1 motion in Parliament." In Demirel's view, the result was a textbook case of "mismanagement, not 'democracy'" in action. He suggested that Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc, who opposed the resolution, was among the few who understood clearly what he was trying to do; before the vote, Arinc declined to read aloud the rules about how votes would be counted (in this case, that abstentions could mean -- as they did -- the failure of the government to obtain the necessary absolute majority).

¶13. (C) Demirel also observed that media critics in the United States had started to criticize "Turkey," vice simply the government -- which risked fomenting "anti-Americanism" in the Turkish press and elsewhere. While it would be natural for Turkish media to try to rebut such charges, Demirel expressed concern lest it get out of hand. "People will rally to defend Turkey. I'm worried about provocations" in the Turkish press.

¶14. (C) "Coming to the military," Demirel stated, "I don't know how or why" the military did not push to support the March 1 resolution. "How come the Pentagon didn't work on them?" Ambassador replied that USG/DoD had had continuing and detailed negotiations and consultations with military leaders on all aspects of the Iraq operation, including Turkey's potential role in it. However, the USG sense is that the Turkish military is highly suspicious of USG intentions in northern Iraq, despite: (1) the fact that the U.S. is fully in control in the north and throughout Iraq; and (2) our repeated assertions on the need to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity and opposition to the emergence of an independent Kurdish state. Demirel noted that Turkey is "sensitive" on the Kurdish question and regards it as a "casus belli." He expressed strong confidence that the USG would live up to its commitments in this regard, but added, "I understand that you have to do something for the Kurds -- they helped you." Demirel suggested that a federal state in n. Iraq would be reasonable so long as it had a regional vice ethnic name (i.e., no "Kurdish"/"Kurdistan"). To Demirel, the bottom line is that there is and will be a power vacuum in Iraq that only the USG can fill; the U.N. he said, would only make a hash out of the situation, as would the Iraqis, at least initially.

¶15. (C) Demirel also raised concerns about problems associated with delays in the Baku-Ceyhan-Tbilisi pipeline and rumors of its possible "postponement," which he said, would promote an additional measure of "anti-American sentiment" in both Turkey and Azerbaijan. Ambassador offered assurances that the USG continued strongly to support the project. He noted that the problems, such as they are, revolve around BOTAS' management, which had led to a two-month delay in the construction schedule. BOTAS needed to get back on the timetable.

Whither Turkey

16. (C) Ambassador stated that the U.S. is watching Turkey to determine where it is heading now that the Iraq war is over and there are new realities on the ground. From the USG perspective, it is important to rebuild bilateral trust. Demirel intimated that there is a debate underway in Ankara now. "Where should Turkey go -- with Iran, Syria, Egypt, Russia?" In his view, "Turkey's interests in development dictate that we side with the West, the U.S. and the EU. We have no other alternative." Returning to Turkish military suspicions of the U.S., Demirel said that "soldiers should talk to soldiers." Though the military worries about the PKK/KADEK presence on both sides of the Turkish-Iraqi border, "the Turkish Army cannot make war on the Kurds or the people of northern Iraq." The USG must adhere to President Bush's commitment to combat terrorism. Ambassador replied that the USG is committed to ensuring that Iraq will no longer serve as a haven for any terrorist groups.

Comment

17. (C) Demirel's influence with the civilian political class is waning -- he has so far been unable to shake the right-of-center DYP, his political baby, out of the increasingly deep torpor into which DYP leader Agar appears to be dragging it. He does, however, have the ear of the Turkish State; there is no politician to whom the military will more readily listen than the conciliatory ex-President -- though as reftel suggests, perhaps fewer and fewer ultimately share his views on U.S.-Turkish relations. (Moreover, it is unclear how much influence he has with Sezer, whose performance in the run-up to the war suggests he takes little guidance from his predecessor.)

PEARSON